Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues on the

Armed Services Committee to have a frank discussion about the Iraq war.

We need to make hard choices to ensure that our presence in Iraq does

not do long-term damage to our military or endanger the men and women

who proudly defend our Nation. However, this resolution doesn't address

any of those questions nor does it provide answers for a Nation that

demands them. Instead, Republicans have given us more of the same.

In October 2002, I voted against the resolution authorizing the use

of force against Iraq, but since then, I have supported every

supplemental appropriations measure to fund our troops because it is

Congress's responsibility to give them the resources needed to

accomplish their mission. It is precisely that support for the troops

that motivates me to point out how we may do irreparable harm to our

military if we do not alter our mission in Iraq quickly. Our men and

women in uniform have performed admirably in difficult conditions--in

many cases adapting quickly to missions outside their traditional

roles, such as policing and reconstruction. However, the current pace

of operations is untenable, and we are seeing evidence of the impact it

is having on our military.

Our troops have faced numerous deployments to the area, with the

National Guard and Reserve in particular demand because of their

expertise in needed skills such as policing, civil affairs, and

engineering. Nearly 500,000 members of the Selected Reserves have been

mobilized since September 11, with more than 10,000 members having been

deployed more than three times. We are spending more and more money in

an attempt to meet recruiting and retention goals in the active

military and reserve components, and we are nevertheless starting to

see increasingly more mid-level officers exiting the force--a dangerous

sign for the future health of the military.

Furthermore, the harsh desert conditions in Iraq--coupled with the

high operational tempo--have taken their toll on our equipment, which

is wearing out at twice to nine times the normal rate. The National

Guard has only one-third of its equipment on hand, which weakens our

ability to respond to a natural disaster or other major event on U.S.

soil. Despite the billions we have provided in supplemental

appropriations, it will take years and tens of billions more dollars to

restore our forces to appropriate levels.

General Barry McCaffrey recently traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan to

assess U.S. operations there. Upon his return, he briefed the Armed

Services Committee on his findings and gave us a very frank assessment.

He has stated that we should know by the end of the year whether the

new Iraqi government will be effective in controlling the insurgency.

He has also claimed that we cannot sustain our current level of

operations beyond Christmas without breaking our military and

endangering our ability to fight future missions. In other words, we

are quite possibly six months away from a point of no return that could

have long-ranging effects on our military and the stability of the

Middle East.

So what is our strategy to prevent the worst-case scenario from

occurring? Where is the accountability? Where is the Congressional

oversight? I'll tell you one thing--they're not in the resolution we're

debating today. The Republican leadership promised a debate on Iraq but

then refused to consider any alternatives to their own bill, preferring

to embrace the status quo and ignore the very difficult decisions this

Congress needs to make. We deserve better. Our brave men and women in

uniform deserve better. The American people deserve better.